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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: FEBRUARY 18, 2009

Summary: Reports and photographs of TNSM (Tehrik-e-Nifaz Shariat) chief Sufi Mohammad's arrival to Mingora to "play the role of savior" as "life returned to near normalcy" in the area, dominated headlines in all newspapers on Wednesday. Also front paged were remarks of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressing that the "U.S. is studying the agreement and trying to understand the Pakistan government's intention," and that "extremists pose a direct threat to Pakistan as well as to the security of the U.S." Some major newspapers reported that the NWFP Chief Minister Hoti had "threatened to quit" if hurdles were created in the implementation of the understanding reached between the TNSM and his administration. Reports of a car blast in Peshawar killing five people received prominent coverage.

Most major newspapers ran in-depth editorials on the far-reaching consequences of the latest peace deal. The leading mass circulation Urdu daily, "Jang," opined that the "final decision should be made by the Parliament," as a large number of politicians, intellectuals, analysts and legal experts had "expressed their apprehensions and doubts on the introduction of Shariat laws in Swat valley." The liberal Urdu daily, "Express," noted that the "U.S. and its allies have perhaps not digested this deal. Hence it would not be wrong to say that the first U.S. missile strike in Kurram Agency was an expression of this displeasure." The second largest Urdu daily, "Nawa-i-Waqt," advised President Zardari to "tell the U.S. not to sabotage efforts for establishing peace." End Summary.

News Stories

"Sufi In Mingora To Play The Role Of Savior" "Dawn" (02/18)

"Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi chief Maulana Sufi Mohammad urged the people of Swat on Tuesday to support efforts for peace so that the region was put back on the path to progress and prosperity. According to AP news agency, Maulana Sufi said his party would soon hold talks with the Taliban."

"U.S. Trying To Read Pak Govt. Mind: Clinton" "The News" (02/18)

"Expressing grave concern over the activities of extremists in Pakistan, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said extremists pose a direct threat to the Government of Pakistan as well as to the security of the United States, Afghanistan and a number of other nations in the region, while addressing a joint press conference with her Japanese counterpart Hirofumi Nakasone in Tokyo on Tuesday. When asked about agreement between Taliban and

Pakistan Government in Swat, she said the U.S. is studying the agreement and trying to understand the Pakistan government's intention and the actual agreed-upon language."

"Constitution Of Pakistan Has Provision For Islamic Law" "Dawn" (02/18)

"The U.S. State Department said on Tuesday that there was provision for the Islamic law in the Pakistani constitution and the government's decision to introduce religious laws in the Swat valley was not an issue for anyone outside Pakistan."

"U.S. In Contact With Pakistan Over Swat Deal: State Dept." "The News" (02/18)

"The United States State Department had no specific comment to offer on the Swat peace agreement, saying it is in contact with the Pakistani government to learn about the full strategy, State Department spokesman Gordon K. Duguid, said at the daily briefing."

"Nizam-e-Adl Will Not Affect Govt's Policy On Terror: Zardari" "Daily Times" (02/18)

"The implementation of the Nizam-e-Adl Regulations 2009 in Malakand division will not affect the government's policy on the war against terror, President Asif Ali Zardari said on Tuesday."

"Government Says Accord Not A Sign Of Weakness" "Dawn" (02/18)

"President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, at a meeting in Islamabad on Tuesday, reviewed the Swat peace accord and expressed the hope it would pave way for permanent peace in the country. Sources in the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) told 'Dawn' the President and the Prime Minister were of the view that the accord should not be considered a 'weakness' of the government."

"Anti-Terror Fight Cannot Be Won With Guns, Bombs: Zardari" "The News" (02/18)

"President Asif Ali Zardari has said the government is pursuing a three-pronged strategy to counter terrorism. Zardari said the fight against terrorism could not be won with guns and bombs only and it must be multi-faceted. He expressed these views in an interview given to Chinese journalists on Monday."

"Hoti Threatens To Quit If Swat Deal Blocked" "The News" (02/18)

"NWFP Chief Minister Amir Haider Hoti has threatened to quit if hurdles are created in the implementation of the fresh understanding reached between the Tanzim-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) and his regime."

"From Son-in-Law To The Father-in-Law" "Dawn" (02/18)

"Never before in the troubled history of the NWFP has the outcome of a peace agreement so heavily depended on one man. The septuagenarian leader of an outlawed Islamist movement has been entrusted with the task of ending - almost single-handedly - blood-letting and throat-slitting in one of the most strife-torn regions of the country and restoring to it an abiding peace. Such are the dramatic twists and turns of events in the chequered history of Pakistan that the government has had to turn to the man it had cast into prison for illegally crossing over into Afghanistan to wage what he viewed as Jihad against the invading American force. His much-maligned organization, Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi, is now being expected to salvage the seemingly irredeemable situation in Swat."

"NATO Concerned Over Pak Deal With Militants" "The News" (02/18)

"NATO expressed concern on Tuesday after Pakistan signed a pact with TNSM to introduce Islamic law in the Swat valley, NATO spokesman James Appathurai told a news briefing in Brussels."

"Amnesty Says Govt. Handing Over Swat People To Taliban" "The News" (02/18)

"Reacting to the official announcement about the enforcement of the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation in the Malakand division and Kohistan district, Amnesty International (AI) Asia-Pacific Director Sam Zarifi has said the government is reneging on its duty to protect the human rights in Swat valley 'by handing them over to the Taliban.'"

"Pakistan Taking Slippery Road In Implementing Shariah" "Daily Times" (02/18)

"Pakistan has gambled that an offer to implement Sharia in parts of the northwest will bring peace to the troubled Swat valley, but analysts fear any lull won't last long and appeasement is likely to embolden the Taliban. Western officials fear Pakistan is taking a slippery road that would only benefit Al Qaeda and the Taliban, but Pakistani authorities believe the alternative of using overwhelming force on people who are, after all, Pakistanis poses a greater danger."

"Jamaat Endorses Govt.-TNSM Accord; Observes Peace Day In Malakand Today" "The News" (02/18)

"Announcing unconditional support to the government-TNSM deal for enforcement of Islamic law, the Jamaat-e-Islami on Tuesday announced to observe Peace Day in Malakand Division today (Wednesday)."

"Pak Army Vows To Hold Fire In Swat" "The News" (02/18)

"The military on Tuesday vowed to hold fire and respect an agreement signed between the government and militants to enforce Islamic law in the violence-torn Swat Valley. The army will not take any offensive action, chief military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas told AFP."

"First Blast After Peace Deal; 6 Die" "The Nation" (02/18)

"As many as six people including two assailants were killed and 17 others got injured, many of them critically, when a bomb planted in a car blew up outside the house of Union Nazim Bazid Khel, Faheemur Rehman, in Badabair area Peshawar on Tuesday, police said."

"U.S. Must Address Pakistan's Security Concerns Through South Asia Diplomacy" "Daily Times" (02/18)

"The United States should dedicate robust economic assistance for uplift of the Pakistani people along its Afghan border and also help resolve Pakistan's security concerns by engaging Islamabad and New Delhi as part of a regional solution to the Afghan conflict, a new study by a Washington think tank said on Tuesday. The research released by the U.S. Institute of Peace acknowledged that Pakistan 'has legitimate security interests in its region and it has few conventional political, military, or diplomatic tools to achieve its interests.'"

"Drones Parked In Pakistan" "The News" (02/18)

"Amid the raging controversy over U.S. drones and whether they take off from Afghanistan or Pakistan, at least one fact has been definitely confirmed: the drones have been parked on Pakistani soil. Two pictures of an unidentified flying strip in Balochistan - bearing the coordinates 27 degrees 51 minutes North, 65 degrees and 10 minutes East - prove that Pakistani ground was being used, at least until 2006."

"6 Militants Among 10 Killed In Bajaur" "The News" (02/18)

"At least, 10 people, including six militants, a woman and three children, were killed and several others injured in military action and rockets attack in different areas of restive Bajaur Agency on Tuesday."

Editorials/Op-eds

"Nizam-e-Adl: Final Decision Should Be Made By Parliament," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (02/18)

"A large number of politicians, intellectuals, analysts, and legal experts have expressed their apprehensions and doubts about the introduction of Sharia laws in the insurgency-hit Swat valley, therefore, it is essential for the government to put forward this issue in the Parliament for debate and any final decision."

"Malakand Agreement And U.S. Missile Attack," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 100,000) (02/18)

"Only time will tell how successful this deal proves to be and how far it goes in restoring peace. However, an immediate result was that as in the past America and its allies have perhaps not digested this deal. Hence it would not be wrong to say that the first U.S. missile strike in Kurram agency was an expression of this displeasure. This displeasure was also displayed in a statement by Mr. Holbrooke where he termed the Taliban in Swat as a threat to Pakistan, India and the U.S."

"Reservations On Peace Accord: Do America And Government Of Pakistan Not Want Peace?" an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (02/18)

"President Asif Ali Zardari should immediately sign the Nizam-i-Adl agreement in order to convey to the provincial government and the leadership of TNSM his consent on the treaty. Moreover, Zardari should tell America that it should not sabotage efforts for establishing peace."

"Rewarding Militancy?," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/18)

"Once all the posturing and bombast is stripped away we are left with nothing of real substance, and the circular dance of death and destruction will continue. The government will not implement the deal until peace is restored, and the militants will not restore peace until the government accedes to their demands. There will be further rounds of talks that take nobody anywhere and everybody will blame everybody else for the 'failure' of the process that was never a process in the first place."

"Revisiting Swat," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/18)

"But a lot now depends on the TNSM and the Tehrik-i-Taliban's local chapter to do their best to put an end to violence and make sure that peace returns to the restive region sooner rather than later. It is only after the civil administration is allowed to start its normal functioning that the government would be able to withdraw the security forces from the valley. It bears repeating that the Army's prolonged presence in Swat is not good for its own image."

"Shariah Law In Malakand," an editorial in the country's premier business newspaper, "Business Recorder" (cir. 25,000) (02/18)

"Since Maulana Sufi Muhammad's role as representative of the militants has been acknowledged by the Swat chapter of the Pakistan Tehrik-i-Taliban (PTT) there is the hope that the agreement would be implemented by both sides, putting to rest the worry in the U.S.-led anti-terror coalition that such agreements give militants the time to re-group."

"Enforcement Of Shariah In Malakand And World Community," an editorial in the Lahore-based Urdu daily "Waqt" (circ. 5000) (02/18)

"Some international powers are viewing the Nizam-i-Adl Regulation in Malakand and Kohistan with concern. U.S. President's Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke has said that we are looking into the Malakand deal and have asked the U.S. Ambassador to submit a report. He has even gone to the extent of saying that the Swat Taliban are a threat to India, Pakistan and the U.S. This statement shows that the U.S. is not willing to give the Taliban any status other than that of terrorists."

"Conspiracies Of The Anti-Pakistan Elements To Frustrate Nizam-i-Adl," an editorial in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (02/18)

"The Nizam-i-Adl is not acceptable to the United States in any case, that is why its drones hit the Kurram Agency for the first time where there is no trace of Taliban or Al-Qaeda operatives. What is the reason that whenever there is any peace deal or any move to reach ceasefire in the Pakistani border areas, the drones hit those regions? In fact such strikes are meant to foil peace efforts, and the U.S. never want to see a stable and peaceful Pakistan."

"Government Should Express Sincerity In Implementation Of Shariah Laws," an editorial note in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (02/18)

"President Zardari must not make the implementation of the Sharia laws subject to the establishment of peace in Swat valley, as the other party (TNSM) has made peace conditional to the Shariah laws. This state of affairs can create a kind of stalemate, and the peace process will not move forward."

"Shariah Enforcement Regulation: Real Happiness After 15 Days," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (02/18)

"Following the Nizam-i-Adl Regulation, no one has expressed any opinion on issues related to women's educational institutions, women's employment and hijab. Peshawar High Court Bar President Latif Afridi has rightly said that the real situation will become clear after 15-20 days, and it will be known who is responsible for destroying peace in the country. Hence, any real happiness about the Nifaz-i-Shariat Regulation [should be expressed] after 15-20 days."

"Announcement To Establish Shariah Courts" an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (02/18)

"The people of Swat have found a solution to their problems in the shape of Shariah based judicial system, but what is the sin of the populace of the rest of the country that they have been left to fend for themselves. The rulers and lawmakers should introduce revolutionary changes in the paralyzed judicial system in the rest of the country."

"Swat Deal: An Act Of Desperation?," an op-ed by Nasim Zehra in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/18)

"The key areas of concern with regard to the February 16 developments are two that the government cannot afford to ignore. One, that if the government, under duress from the armed militants, has moved the Adl Regulation 2009 Bill, what message does it send to other armed groups using crime and terrorism as blackmail tools to get their demands met? Two, what if the non-TNSM militants spreading acute terror and insecurity in Swat demand that the Adl Regulation 2009 plus more of Shariah be implemented before they would stop their activities? Three, if Fazlullah decides he and his men do not agree with the government-TNSM peace accord, what practical value will the accord have as a security-enhancer for Swat? The armed men are with Fazlullah, not with the TNSM.... There may be a temporary halt in the fighting, but whether long-haul peace will flow from these negotiations is unclear. The odds do not heavily favor it."

"Our Rulers: Erratic, Fearful And Full Of Deceit," an op-ed by Shireen M. Mazari in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/18)

"For the rest of the country it is important to realize that if we do not want to create a situation akin to what has been happening in Swat, we need to push the government into establishing the rule of law and an independent judiciary as well as ensuring the safety and security of all its citizens - especially against foreign threats. It is in this context that Pakistan has to delink from the US and reclaim all our bases from them. Unless we create some space between ourselves and the U.S., there will never be any stability in this country."

"Drone Attacks On Kurram Agency And Prime Minister's Gentle Condemnation," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (02/18)

"Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has condemned U.S. drone attacks on Pakistan, saying these attacks are not in the interest of Pakistan and the U.S. will have to reconsider the policy.... While our leaders demonstrate helplessness in the face of predator attacks, the possibility of these drones hitting targets in Islamabad cannot be ruled out."

"Drones In Pakistan," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/18)

"American operated drones are unequivocally bad; Pakistani operated drones would be the best-case scenario; while jointly operated drones would be politically nettlesome but likely manageable. The Americans must realize that the local political fallout isn't just the Pakistan government's or army's problem; unless the two centers of power here are stable, the Americans will not have an effective partner in fighting militancy."

"Kurram Killings," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/18)

"Islamabad needs to reassess its tactics. A proposal floated by Washington is said to suggest that the attacks be presented openly as a joint Pak-U.S. effort. This would at least have the advantage of coming clean with the people -- something that could work in favor of a government that no one believes anyway. But Pakistan needs also to assess where its tumble into U.S. control is taking it."

"A Dangerous Trend," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/18)

"The continuation of these drone attacks also shows our government's failure to convince numerous U.S. dignitaries who visited the country, thus strengthening the suspicion that official protestations are only meant for public consumption.... Instead of playing politics, the government should come clean on the issue. Striking secret deals with the U.S., or any other foreign power will only prove counterproductive."

"A Peek Into The Past," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/18)

"The Musharraf era has once more been under scrutiny, following a book by a prominent New York Times journalist in which he has accused the former President of secretly supporting militancy.... The Musharraf years, from 1999 to 2008, are important in more ways than one.... But it is also true that, through this period, militants gained power and strength. Little or no effort was made to tackle the likes of Swat's Maulana Fazlullah or the Khyber Agency's Mangal Bagh in the days before their amassed armies were able to endanger state rule. In Waziristan, peace deals were struck twice with Baitullah Mehsud, even as terrorized people fled the region. Today, we are paying the price."
Patterson